

£1,000M conflict for culture

From DAVID TONGE, Athens, September 25

Tucked away on the south-west coast of the Peloponnese is the small town of Pilos, a port featuring in most tourist guide books and, under its more famous name of Navarino, in every single history of the country. It was from here that Nestor set sail for Troy, that Telemachus landed while searching for his father Odysseus, and that the Ottoman fleet was destroyed in 1827, ensuring the survival of modern Greece.

Now, however, a conflict between business interests and environmentalists is raging over the fate of Greece's most superb and unspoilt natural port. The dispute is not merely over building a couple of small industrial units, but over whether the ship owner Karageorgis should be allowed to start a £1,000 million complex of steelworks, shipyards, and a cement plant.

The Government approves the idea, as do the villagers who — given the traditional Athens neglect for the provinces — see no alternative economic future for themselves. "All parties support the idea," said the local Centre Union Deputy Andreas Kokkevis. He adds that protecting the environment does not help one pay one's bills.

However, Mrs Helen Vlachou,

publisher of the newspaper Kathimerini, though a Government Deputy, has embraced the environmental cause. The paper's leading article on Sunda foresaw the grimy skies and oil-slicked beaches which threaten the future, suggesting that history will condemn today's rulers as barbarians and the locals as blind, and described how a "cultured Minister of Culture," the former Oxford professor, Mr Tripanis, has supported the project.

Mr Tripanis today claims that his Ministry had never formed an opinion on the subject — for the rather surprising reason that the Government had refused to spend the £15,000 necessary to prepare the study required by the Ministry. Kathimerini, however, claimed that on June 17 the Archaeological Council had rejected the plans, while two senior archaeologists are quoted as saying that on August 9 the Council had decided to demand to see project plans.

The archaeological services in Greece, which come under Mr Tripanis, have traditionally been in the position of being able to veto any threat to the country's heritage, particularly in an area like Pilos, which had been proposed as a national monument. But all this changed just over two weeks ago when a low-key meeting of the small summer Parliament passed, without serious discussion, a law giving the Minister of Coordination the right to override the archaeological services' advice.

Capital is this arguably doing better than culture in today's difficult economic conditions here, and even the archaeologists have been out on strike demanding the right to participate in laws under preparation. They are hoping to regain some of the powers stripped from them by the Junta.

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ER, Paris, September 25

depress the true conditions of free communication between men," he added. "That's what happened in the face of true liberalism."

He said the censorship was "indirect" — it was proposed to suppress the project as ori-